



NATIONAL PTA GETS CONNECTED WITH SOCIAL MEDIA

People are busy, we all know that. Getting their attention is harder and harder all the time. That's especially true for member organizations and advocacy groups. The National PTA is both and has adapted some social media practices to reach out and maintain contact with more than 5 million volunteers in 25,000 local units. James Martinez, senior manager of media relations for National PTA, talks about these efforts and how it's paying off.

By Derek Phillips

What are some of the ways National PTA is using social media and new technology to engage with members, spread your message, and follow what's going on in the world?

We're building an online community of fans and followers using Facebook, Twitter, YouTube and Fotki. The objective is two-fold: connect with, engage, and inform members and concerned citizens in a real way, and mobilize them to take action using our social networks to benefit PTA, education, and children.

Have you seen your activities yield any results? Any stories you can share?

Yes! We've had great results across the board. From creating buzz across online communities about PTA's efforts, to positively affecting our bottom line, our social media activities prove to be effective.

For example, we've had fans post multiple comments, video, and photos on campaigns like PTA Take Your Family to School Week—one of our biggest campaigns of the year. This helped get people excited for events they've planned in their school.

How have you seen membership change, and what are you doing to react? What technological changes are you implementing?

Although the demographics of our membership are predominantly the same, we're implementing multiple programs, initiatives, and campaigns to target today's parent and child advocate. One of the ways we're doing that through technology is that we're helping state PTA offices and local PTAs create Facebook pages and Twitter accounts. We're educating them on the benefits of staying engaged socially online. We're also encouraging PTAs to conduct PTA meetings in chat rooms and post a podcast of their meetings for parents who couldn't make the meeting. We're educating our current membership on the "ways of life" of young parents to show them that we're relevant and still need everyone's help and support.

How do you, personally, use new technology in your relationships with media?

I post updates on my Facebook page with recently released media releases, podcasts of PTA Radio, and video and photos of all of our latest events. In addition, I "friend" media contacts on Facebook to show them a personal side of me and to see their personal side.

As I train PTA leaders on media relations, I always stress the importance of the word "relations" in media relations. It's important to know that a lot of PR and media relations is about relationships. The media (reporters, producers, editors, and directors) are all regular people, and we need to treat them as such. Moreover, if you have a friend who only contacts you when they need something, you'd probably notice that and not receive their calls as you would a friend who calls just to say "hi" or to see how you're doing. Now consider that same situation between you and the media. They'll be more inclined to cover your story if they have a good relationship with you. Social media helps me stay in contact on a "friendlier" basis with some of my biggest contacts.



Is National PTA considering using technology to encourage community and sharing between members? Anything you can tell me about?

Definitely! We've created PTAgreatideabank.org. It's a perfect example of a social network for members to share more than just success stories, but also include photos and create profiles of themselves. We're constantly looking at more ways for members to be interactive with each other.

How does your use of this technology help you manage messaging? Or has it made that part of the job more difficult?

It helps a tremendous amount. Everything from blogging, to plain old status updates on Facebook—it all gives us several ways to deliver messages. For example, if we want to get a message out but not issue a news release, we can have leadership blog about it. If we want reaction to something we're working on or want to give members/fans a sneak peak or "tease" an event or news item, we'll post something on our Facebook page as a status update. In other words, we have a very good understanding of and grip on our messaging. Social media adds to the options we have of delivering it and helps us ensure that state PTAs and local PTAs are all up on our messages every day. **[OC]**

Derek Phillips is content director for Critical Mass, an international digital marketing firm. Reprinted with permission of the author.

WHAT ARE PTA MEMBERS SAYING ONLINE?

"The Parent Teacher Association is a great resource to find out what you've missed while you were away from school. Contact your State or District/Council leaders to learn what's been happening where you live." - Myrdin T.



"The #PTA is more than fundraising! They're supporting our kids' #education AND health & wellness! <http://t.co/ooV6mhN> Thanks @ptaeditor!" - myi



"We are working on a project that National PTA needs to help us with quickly. 20+ emails, two phone calls just today - they have provided top notch customer service!!!!..." - Indiana PTA



"York will be introducing RT @ptaeditor: Watch D.O.G.S. (a partner of National PTA) doing great things to engage males!" - YorkPTA



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